

## PEACE OUT

I begin this chapter standing in my garage. I type it on a laptop acquired from Newegg for \$47. It's garbage, with neither the primary or secondary battery able to hold a charge. Thus it is plugged into a power strip that I have affixed to the shelf in the corner. The builders of this house only put a single outlet in this garage, so I have to milk it for all that it's worth. Currently it carries a load of space heater (it is April 7, the day before Fred's birthday, and cold), a pair of fluorescent lights for the greenhouse, the baby monitor, the deep freeze, and, of course, this laptop.

Naturally I have begun the garden in the greenhouse. My sister was kind enough to let me borrow it this year. In it I have a variety of things, some sweet tomatoes and peppers, some mesclun mixes, some *Rudbeckia hirta* that I plan to plant coming up the hill along Galbraith Road, some marigolds for the little enclave beneath Annabelle's room ("Annabelle's Garden"), and various other plants, including both salad and pickling cucumbers, started much too early.

The baby monitor allows me to listen to Annabelle. Unfortunately even at her advanced age of nearly three I still have to. She's been tearing paint off the walls, ripping pages from books, getting out of bed, turning the light on, you name it. This morning Sarah and I awoke to the cat screeching in terror. I had to run in and check her. I have to check her a lot lately.

The freezer stores all I grew last year along with whatever amenities Sarah brings home from Kroger. It's not a large one; I dare say it wouldn't hold the yield from even a small doe. But it's enough to get by. Which is what we do: Enough to get by. To some I probably look to be a bit of a failure considering my vast affinity for knowledge, perhaps how I seemingly have not applied it in the manners which were most befitting in the opinion of others.

But I am not others. I am not far removed from those that got by on what they knew of the world within which they were able to immerse themselves. I suppose I spent too much time with Fred, heard too many stories from my mother about money being unimportant. Well it is, and then it isn't, and that is quite the reason that old saying will always continue to go.

Yet here I am typing on this throw-away laptop in my garage, standing because I still can. It's resting on a makeshift podium thrown together with the cat carrier, the Rubbermaid tub that formerly held the greenhouse parts, and a piece of plywood that I typically use to cover the window opening when I put the window air conditioning unit in during May of every year. This is a writer's space, the garage. This is a writer's world. Am I a writer?

At the most basic level, naturally. I am inputting these words. I am inscribing my thoughts into a form that can be preserved throughout generations to come. But will they endure? Who can say. I would like to fathom that what I put down in these pixels is relatable to some. I would like to give something, return thanks. When I began this it was intended to be a memoir, a record of family history. I have been groomed and equipped to be the one to do it, and I have always had the desire to do so, whether it was instilled in me or simply an innate thirst for preservation of everything that my people are.

I've changed a little since then. My humility, a former detriment to everything to me in life, has waned with age, defiance, struggle, whatever you want to call the amalgamation of it all. I want it to be more. I want to take you with me. I want this to be a journey with me for those that read these words. I want you to defeat sorrow and find strength in what I say in these paragraphs. To simply record a family memoir seems so selfish, though if you pay due attention to the family stories that I tell, it is a great responsibility and blessing, this task that I undertake, and I do it with the most earnest of wills.

I stand in my garage because I still can. There will come a day when I will no longer stand. I pray it doesn't come slowly; I'd prefer to die with the use of my lower extremities intact. No one wishes to be

bedridden or chair-bound. Nothing is lost on me. When I sprained my ankle rather grotesquely in October, I understood that an injury like that at 39 is manageable. I cannot fathom what to expect at 49.

My rehab was simple: Keep moving. Work it out. Keep the blood flowing. All the things you have probably heard from an elder. So that's what I did. I mean, what would old Roland Weldon have done if he sprained his ankle tripping over a limb in the woods? I believe he'd have walked it off.

It is April and I believe it is almost finished but it has been much slower than I had expected. I run on it regularly. It has not a full motion of range but it's getting there. I haven't been making my 15 miles a week running, but it has also been winter, and I must say that I was able to get out many times for a run this winter, with the temperatures setting records a couple of times if I'm not mistaken, Chris Bailey.

But the lesson was delivered, be it by God at my own iniquity, that more or less I'm getting too old for this shih tzu. It was important for me entering my forties to find myself in better physical form, at the least in preparation for the incredible physical shape one must be in to keep up with a feral two-year old. I suppose it is relevant to mention that I also watched Dad go through his age of reinvention. I can't even recall how old he was at the time, but I think I figured it up one day in my head in the shower and it had to be just about the exact same time.

That's a funny story of the old man right there. Down in the basement with his feet locked under a dresser full of Mom's miscellanies doing sit-ups listening to Bon Jovi tapes. And what's the very first thing that came to your mind when you read that sentence? Of course it was that one particular song when he got up and danced like he was Stallone in Philly. And then the push ups. There were free weights. He did upright rows and curls and the likes. He was halfway there.

And now I do the same. I whittle my frame away with antiquated forms of movement, the most primitive exercises it would appear. I secured that reel lawn mower last year with credit card points. And what a scam that is, a scheme to jack your interest rate to here or there, minus a few miniscule deep percentage points. Then they'll throw you some kind of virtual currency, something where you can see a picture on a pixelated screen without inspecting firsthand. And you will buy it because it has been made to appear to you a bargain. Sucker.

But as always I drift to other thoughts. Which is what the mind can do to you, especially when you halve about a half of one. (My old Papaw Fred gets half the credit for that one.)

The fact that I am aging is a reality and something that everyone feels all in one moment. No one comes to this conclusion over time. That's just not how it transpires. It would be more useful that way. Our greatest endeavors, as a highly informed and refined species, are bent upward toward survival. Nobody really wants to die. Those that die the youngest want it the least because their appreciation for all that they see is not undermined by what they have not yet seen. One could say that it's an existential argument. That one has the brain. It very much is.

I grew up very Baptist. I very much adhere to my faith to this day. It has been a major influence in my development as a person living in this society. This society is a funny one. It has been, to me, even before the impact of electronic correspondence, a room of listening and not speaking. It is infinitely expounded by technology at this point, and I suppose that's just a reflection of how it's always been for me. And I don't care to complain. A lot of my listening was with my ears upon my elders, and from them I learned great things. I still learn from them in their absence.

But death is a reality. And it follows you. You run from it, sure. These are concepts that have reverberated through every written or spoken story through time. It's about how and when you feel it. That's where numbers take over. You start thinking of math. You weigh statistics here, statistics there. Are they skewed? Who really ever knows.

The reality is that one day, we all die. It'd be nice if it would be on the same day so we could all go

together. That would be closer to holy I surmise. But that's just not how the sequence of the universe is ordered. Call it a very primitive belief, but continuity involves overlap and extension. Back to my principles with regard to recording this particular piece of history: I want everyone to get a new mindset. Appreciative. Gracious. Understanding. Prepared. But most of all, prescient. Pay attention to the past because it duly recreates itself.

I cannot fathom I am doing this because it does indeed feel like a curse upon myself. I have chosen to write this, my last chapter, with no intention of dying anytime soon, but with the reality that I am at the mercy of attorneys. Sarah and I are unmarried, a girl and a little boy due in three weeks, and I am trying to force out an account of all this during the scant moments I have because I fear that some obscure incident could become me and take me to my new home. And would that be so irrational?

When you come from a large family, and they didn't have much money or knowledge of better health practices, you get to see a lot of death, in many cases early on. I have been to funerals since I was a mere lad. Learning it isn't fun, but knowing it is a blessing. You learn that you do, indeed, now have a privilege, a gift from your elders. You can move it forward.

But even as seemingly comfortable with death as I became when I was so close to it, death from a distance always bored through my soul. The news of Terri passing was debilitating to me when I was locked into the Hudson Valley. I had just formed what I felt was a much closer bond with her. So strange, a man of numbers as I am, that she would die on the same day as Ora, Fred's old man. The universe has a strange sequence sometimes.

I wasn't there. I wasn't there for Stefanie. I wasn't there for Demaree. These are the things that plague you. You want everyone else to survive. It's a bit of the heart and soul of who I am. And I spent two weekends with Fred when he was in the hospital in Bloomington, but it was not enough. I wanted to be there when he took his next big step.

Dad very succinctly said during his eulogy that the old man left on his own terms. I can't even paraphrase my father because he spoke so eloquently that day and I cannot do it justice. But I shall make an attempt: "He stuck around for so long because he knew he could take it and we couldn't." It's the precise sentiment. That's strength. That's beauty. And it's what I come from.

This is the last chapter in what I have decided to go and fill in through the middle as time goes on. This is both my art and my life. This is me, your humble navigator on the voyage to appreciation and preservation. I won't be going anywhere for awhile. No, not far. Not long ago, not far away. If I leave, be it anytime soon...

Well what is soon? I really don't know. We don't. Something I learned in Liberty Baptist Church. I plan to be here to incessantly annoy you all for as long as I possibly can. But if I have to leave, you'll always have this chapter. You'll always have of me what I have given you here. You will always know and love me, because I am truly your conviction, your own, if you are still reading this to the final word. Which I have decided should be *awesome*.